

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE REVIEW PANEL
MEETING MINUTES

Date: April 24, 2014

Meeting No.: 183

Project: Penn Square Phase II Apartments

Phase: Schematic

Location: Pennsylvania Avenue

PRESENTATION:

Ms. Faith Nevins, Architect representing Marks and Thomas Architects; presented the revised site development and architectural schematic design. As conceived, the project consists of sixty residential apartment units, ground level retail fronting on to Pennsylvania Avenue; and the primary residential entry and amenities located on the south side of the building facing the surface parking lot. The revised design incorporates a linear four story building situated along Pennsylvania Avenue, a surface parking lot accessed from Pennsylvania Avenue and Bruce Street, and a significant green lawn open space on the south-east corner of the site.

Architecturally, the building is composed of “end caps” articulated by a strong gridded frame with a playful juxtaposition of window and accent panel inserts. The “mid block” component is composed primarily of masonry with accentuated masonry fin walls and a pitched roof.

COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL:

The Panel was generally pleased with the revised design direction and felt that the linear building fronting along Pennsylvania Avenue and the creation of a green lawn were major improvements. The Panel viewed favorably the “end cap” components with the strong gridded frame and playful juxtaposition of windows and accent panels. Although opinions differed, a majority of the Panel believed the eight foot shift in the building mass was an effective way to visually reduce the length of the building.

SITE DEVELOPMENT CONCERNS:

- 1.) The Panel questioned the viability of the retail given its present location, relationship to the sidewalk level and somewhat remote side entry. It was suggested that a more viable location may be the north-east corner of the building on Pennsylvania Avenue adjacent to the bus stop.

- 2.) Although the Panel felt the creation of the lawn and landscaped open space was a potentially positive gesture, there was concern that the open space was isolated and remote from building activity and the presence of people and “eyes” required to effectively monitor the use of the space. The Panel encouraged the Design Team to address this issue and suggested the relocation of a communal activity room on the south-east corner of the building adjacent and directly accessible to the lawn as a way to provide the necessary activity and “eyes” to ensure the open space is an asset.
- 3.) The Panel felt the location of a secondary entry stair off of Pennsylvania Avenue and its remote location and relationship to the lower level primary entry and reception lobby needed to be improved. It was suggested that shifting the primary entry and lobby to the east and directly opposite the secondary entry stair would address the concern.
- 4.) The prominent location of the Phase I dumpster raised concerns. If relocation is not feasible, then the Panel felt special effort should be made to screen this site element.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN CONCERNS:

- 1.) Although pleased with the design direction of the “end cap” elements, the Panel questioned the articulation of the predominately masonry “mid-block” element, particularly; the need and visual effectiveness of the heavy brick fin walls and pitched roof. Additionally, concern was expressed that creating a “mid-block” gesture precisely at the eight foot shift in the building mass created four distinct elements along the north and south primary facades.
- 2.) Whereas the gridded frame of the “end caps” was viewed favorably, the similar gridded masonry frame of the mid-block component was much less successful. Whereas the “end caps” appeared light, airy and playful; the “mid-block” masonry component appeared unnecessarily heavy due to material, color, tone and detail choices. In the opinion of the Panel, this stark contrast did not promote a unity of composition.
- 3.) The Panel urged the Design Team to restudy the “mid-block” component and suggested that unity and clarity of composition could be achieved by utilizing masonry as a simple base element, utilizing just one color of brick; and treating the upper floors with the same gridded frame and materials as the “end caps”. If the Design Team’s objective is to visually reduce the length of the building, the Panel recommended altering the color of the insert panels within the gridded frame, to differentiate the two shifted building masses.

PANEL ACTION:

Recommend continued development and return schematic presentation.

Attending:

Faith Nevins, Matthew Ormsby, Keith Sullivan, Matt Flament – Marks Thomas Arch.
Lynette Pinhey – Human & Rohde, Inc.
Fred Thompson – Gower Thompson Inc.
Kevin Bell – Woda Group

UDARP Panel Members- Ms. Meany, Messrs. Gary Bowden, Rich Burns* and David Haresign

Tom Stosur, Anthony Cataldo, Kate Edwards, Christina Gaymon, Tamara Woods –
Planning Dept.